

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Biograph Theater Building

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 2433 North Lincoln Avenue

not for publication

city, town Chicago

vicinity of

state Illinois

code 012

county

Cook

code 031

3. Classification

Category

district  
 building(s)  
 structure  
 site  
 object

Ownership

public  
 private  
 both  
**Public Acquisition**  
 in process  
 being considered

Status

occupied  
 unoccupied  
 work in progress  
**Accessible**  
 yes: restricted  
 yes: unrestricted  
 no

Present Use

agriculture  
 commercial  
 educational  
 entertainment  
 government  
 industrial  
 military  
 museum  
 park  
 private residence  
 religious  
 scientific  
 transportation  
 other:

4. Owner of Property

name Laurence & Taryn Edwards

street & number 545 West Dickens Avenue

city, town Chicago

vicinity of

state Illinois 60614

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Cook County Building

street & number Clark & Washington Streets

city, town Chicago

state Illinois 60602

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Illinois Historic Structures  
Survey - Chicago, Lincoln Park

has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1975

federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Illinois Department of Conservation - Historic Sites

city, town Springfield

state Illinois 62706

# 7. Description

**Condition**

excellent     deteriorated  
 good         ruins  
 fair          unexposed

**Check one**

unaltered  
 altered

**Check one**

original site  
 moved    date \_\_\_\_\_

**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

The Biograph Theater is located on the east side of Lincoln Avenue north of Fullerton Avenue. The area was intensively settled by German and Swedish immigrants immediately following the Chicago fire of 1871.

The structure is a two-story brick building designed to accommodate stores and a theater space designed specifically for the exhibition of motion pictures. It was finished in 1915 from designs prepared by Samuel N. Crowen, a local Chicago architect who was responsible for designing the Lake Shore Building, Willoughby Tower Building and others throughout the city.

The property has a 125' frontage on North Lincoln Avenue and a 120' depth extending eastward to a north-south alley in the rear. Its decorative motif on the exterior is neo-classical with palladian windows directly above the theater marquee. The semi-circular windows are accentuated by white terra-cotta pilasters. The middle of the building is bisected by a white terra-cotta belt course which is repeated.

The bottom floor commercial spaces are provided with plenty of sunlight from the large windows set between the brick piers which carry to the belt course. The arcading of the windows on the second floor serve the same function.

The marquee is little changed from its original condition. It has lost only the name "Essaness" from its front. It retains its early electric lighting scheme and was an early example of later more elaborate marquees. Originally a large perpendicular sign which read "Biograph" was erected on the roof of the building directly above the marquee. This was removed sometime during the 1960's.

The entrance to the theater was remodelled in the late 1920's early '30's in an Art Deco motif. It remains essentially unchanged except for new doors added in the late 1970's. The entry and foyer have been repainted although the essential space remains. The terrazzo floor is from the Art Deco redo. Cove plaster lighting from that period also remains.

The theater auditorium is sited on a south-east to north-west axis. It is rectangular in shape, has a concrete floor pitched downward towards the proscenium and is 67' wide, 92' deep and has ceilings 20' high. There are no central supporting columns, the roof and ceiling being carried by steel trusses which span the auditorium. The theater seat frames are the originals. An air cooling system was added to the building although it is unclear exactly when, but certainly by 1930.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Chicago Crime History
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** built 1915      **Builder/Architect** Samuel N. Crowen

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The Biograph Theater is worthy of National Register nomination because it is truly a landmark in the City of Chicago. Its importance as a theater is notable only in a local sense.

When motion pictures were new, their exhibition took place in stores and auditoriums which had been converted for the purpose. The Biograph is an early example of a building designed specifically for the showing of motion pictures. Its construction coincides with the rapidly stabilizing neighborhood around Lincoln and Fullerton. Its connection with other commercial spaces gave the investors a hedge against the possible failure of this upstart medium. Its modest architectural style was quickly eclipsed by larger more grandiose movie palaces designed and erected after World War I.

The Biograph's national notoriety and, indeed, main claim to fame came on the sultry summer night of July 22, 1934, when noted bank robber/killer, John Dillinger, was ambushed and killed by F.B.I. agents led by Melvin Purvis.

Dillinger, dubbed "Public Enemy #1" by the F.B.I.'s J. Edgar Hoover, attended the Biograph's main bill "Manhattan Melodrama," and upon leaving the theater was gunned down in an alley approximately fifty feet south of the entrance. The F.B.I. agents had been alerted by a female friend of Dillinger's that he would be attending the Biograph that night. His death ended an eleven month career.

Chicago's reputation has always been colored by its history of criminal activities. Until it was torn down in the early 70's, the site of the St. Valentine's Day Massacre was a top tourist draw. The Biograph continues to be so today.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property .345 acres

Quadrangle name CHICAGO LOOP, IL.

Quadrangle scale 1:24 000

UTM References

A 16 446170 4641590  
Zone Easting Northing

B           
Zone Easting Northing

C         

D         

E         

F         

G         

H         

Verbal boundary description and justification

125' frontage on North Lincoln Avenue and is 120' in depth extending East to an alley in the rear (SEE CONTINUATION SHEET)

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state Illinois code county Cook code

state code county code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title William G. Farrar, Chief of Staff Services

organization Historic Sites Division  
Department of Conservation

date January 24, 1984

street & number 405 East Washington

telephone 217/782-8256

city or town Springfield

state Illinois 62706

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *David Kennedy*

title *Director*

date 3/29/84

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Continuation sheet    Biograph Theater    Item number    10    Page    2

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Verbal Boundary Description:

The Northwesterly half of Lot 6, and all of Lots 7 and 8 in Dunning's Subdivision of Out Lot 20 in the Canal Trustees' Subdivision of the East ½ of Section 29, Township 40 North, Range 14, East of the Third Principal Meridian, in Cook County, Illinois

GEORGIA, Clay County, Fort Gaines, Fort Gaines Historic District, Roughly bounded by Chattahoochee River, GA 37, GA 39, College, Commerce and Jefferson Sts. (05/17/84)

GEORGIA, Fulton County, Atlanta, Peachtree Christian Church, 1580 Peachtree St. NW (05/17/84)

GEORGIA, Marion County, Buena Vista vicinity, Shiloh-Marion Baptist Church and Cemetery, GA 41 (05/17/84)

GEORGIA, Muscogee County, Columbus, Adams Cotton Gin Building, 6601 Hamilton Rd. (05/17/84)

IDAHO, Camas County, Fairfield vicinity, Skillern, John, House, NW of Fairfield (05/14/84)

ILLINOIS, Cook County, Chicago, Biograph Theater Building, 2433 N. Lincoln Ave. (05/17/84)

INDIANA, Lake County, Gary, West Fifth Avenue Apartments Historic District, Roughly 5th Ave. from Taft to Pierce St. (05/17/84)

INDIANA, Marion County, Indianapolis, General German Protestant Orphans Home, 1404 S. State St. (05/17/84)

INDIANA, Marion County, Indianapolis, Selig's Dry Goods Company Building, 20 W. Washington St. (05/17/84)

INDIANA, Tipton County, Tipton, Tipton County Jail and Sheriff's Home, 203 S. West St. (05/17/84)

IOWA, Scott County, Davenport, Cork Hill Historic District (Davenport MRA), Perry, Pershing, Iowa, 11th, 12th, and 13th Sts. (05/16/84)

KENTUCKY, Shelby County, Shelbyville vicinity, Threlkeld, Thomas, House, Benson Pike (05/14/84)

MARYLAND, Cecil County, Port Deposit vicinity, Tome School for Boys Historic District, Bainbridge Naval Training Grounds (05/16/84)

MASSACHUSETTS, Bristol County, Attleboro, Hebronville Mill Historic District, Knight Ave., Read and Phillip Sts. (05/17/84)

MASSACHUSETTS, Bristol County, New Bedford, Smith, Bradford, Building, 1927-1941 Purchase St. (05/17/84)

MASSACHUSETTS, Hampden County, Monson, Memorial Town Hall, Main St. (05/17/84)

MASSACHUSETTS, Middlesex County, Lowell, Hoyt-Shedd Estate, 386-396 Andover St., 569-579 E. Merrimack St. (05/17/84)

MASSACHUSETTS, Norfolk County, Wrentham, Roebuck Tavern, 21 Dedham St. (05/17/84)

MICHIGAN, Calhoun County, Marshall, Brooks, Harold C., House (Jabez S. Fitch House) (Boundary Increase), 310 N. Kalamazoo Ave. (04/18/84)

MICHIGAN, Ingham County, Lansing, State Office Building, 316 S. Walnut St. (05/17/84)

MINNESOTA, Freeborn County, Albert Lea, Albert Lea City Hall, 212 N. Broadway Ave. (05/17/84)

MINNESOTA, Redwood County, Delhi, Delhi Coronet Band Hall, Third St. (05/17/84)

MISSISSIPPI, Harrison County, Biloxi, Bailey House (Biloxi MRA), 1333 E. Beach Blvd. (05/18/84)

MISSISSIPPI, Harrison County, Biloxi, Barq, E., Pop Factory (Biloxi MRA), 224 Keller Ave. (05/18/84)

MISSISSIPPI, Harrison County, Biloxi, Biloxi's Tivoli Hotel (Biloxi MRA), 863 E. Beach Dr. (05/18/84)

MISSISSIPPI, Harrison County, Biloxi, Bond House (Biloxi MRA), 925 W. Howard Ave. (05/18/84)

MISSISSIPPI, Harrison County, Biloxi, Brielmaier House (Biloxi MRA), 436 Main St. (05/18/84)

MISSISSIPPI, Harrison County, Biloxi, Brunet-Fourchy House (Biloxi MRA), 138 Magnolia St. Mall (05/18/84)

MISSISSIPPI, Harrison County, Biloxi, Church of the Redeemer (Biloxi MRA), Bellman St. (05/18/84)

MISSISSIPPI, Harrison County, Biloxi, Clemens House (Biloxi MRA), 120 W. Water St. (05/18/84)

MISSISSIPPI, Harrison County, Biloxi, Fisherman's Cottage (Biloxi MRA), 262 E. Bayview Ave. (05/18/84)